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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ENVIRONMENTAL NGO "GREEN SALVATION" TAKES ON
GOLIATH AND WINS

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The environmental NGO Green Salvation, one of the oldest NGOs in Kazakhstan, defends the environmental rights of citizens including with lawsuits, if necessary. It monitors implementation of the Aarhus Convention that grants citizens access to information concerning the environment and works with national parks to help stop illegal hunting and poaching. Its sponsors include the National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation). Thirty percent of the lawsuits it has filed have been decided in their favor, including two cases that went to the Supreme Court. Opponents have labeled Green Salvation a "radical" organization "supported by international imperialists."
END SUMMARY.

GREEN SALVATION DEFENDS CITIZENS' ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

2. (SBU) Green Salvation Director Sergey Kuratov told Regional Environmental Officer on September 16 that his organization was founded in 1990 and is primarily focused on the city of Almaty, although its activities have recently expanded throughout the country. He said Green Salvation, one of the oldest NGOs in Kazakhstan, is registered as a commercial organization, but all profits must be used to cover operating costs.

3. (SBU) Kuratov said Green Salvation has three main objectives. Its primary aim is to defend the rights of citizens with respect to the environment through public education and lawsuits, if necessary. Information is crucial to helping citizens understand their rights and environmental risks. The NGO's web site (www.greensalvation.org) disseminates information in Russian and English, and houses a communal environmental database of more than 70,000 documents. Green Salvation's information campaign is carried out in accordance with the Aarhus Convention, which Kazakhstan has signed and ratified in 1998 (reftel).

4. (SBU) Green Salvation also informs citizens, government officials, and educators about environmental matters of concern through pamphlets, meetings, and workshops, and seminars. For

example, the NGO publishes the annual "Journal of Green Salvation" in Russian and English, and produced a video to publicize their mission and raise awareness about environmental issues in Kazakhstan. Kuratov said that Green Salvation also works with national parks to stop illegal hunting and poaching. They help set up and maintain a two-kilometer sanitary defense zone around the parks, to protect it from intrusion and exploitation. This has proven to be a contentious issue, however, because some say that the zone is too large, while others insist it is too small. In addition, villagers in the proposed sanitary zones are asked to move out, but most have been unwilling to do so.

SUPPORT FROM WESTERN DONORS MAY NOT BE ENOUGH

15. (SBU) Kuratov said Green Salvation's sponsors include the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Dutch Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwe Fund, the Central and Eastern Europe Bankwatch Network, the Global Greengrants Fund, the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation), and the Sigrid Rausing Fund in the UK. Despite this strong lineup of sponsors, Kuratov said the organization is still struggling to survive. Green Salvation has four full-time staff, and six support staff, including an accountant and a web master. In addition, 20 volunteers help Green Salvation carry out various activities. He said Green Salvation does not implement donor-funded projects to generate revenue, since he considers these projects to be short-term, limiting, and not very effective. "Once the project is completed," he said, "the support is gone, but there is always more work to do." Kuratov welcomed additional U.S. sponsorship, and said that American experts (legal, environmental, civil society, etc.) often work with Green Salvation. He stressed that moral support from the United States as it presses its lawsuits in court is extremely important and helps Green Salvation and other NGOs "keep the faith" and continue their

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struggle.

SUCCESSFUL LEGAL DEFENSE

16. (SBU) Kuratov said that Green Salvation's most celebrated activities are the legal defense of citizens who are pressing the government to observe its own environmental laws. It has an environmental hotline that citizens can use to call in and express their concerns. Green Salvation tries to advise and counsel those who call, but if the caller is not satisfied, the NGO will recommend that the parties file a lawsuit. At that point, Green Salvation provides legal assistance throughout the judicial process, drawing on the expertise of environmental attorneys who offer their services pro bono. Kuratov said that 30 percent of all lawsuits filed in 2007-2008 (13 in all) have been decided in favor of the plaintiffs, and of these, 50 percent have resulted in monetary awards. Two of the four cases involving the Aarhus Convention have been decided in favor of the plaintiffs, and one case is still pending. Kuratov said that Green Salvation is the only environmental organization in Kazakhstan that has won cases in court. He said that other NGOs often join forces with Green Salvation in order to benefit from its legal experience.

HAS BEEN CALLED "RADICAL" AND "SUPPORTED BY IMPERIALISTS"

17. (SBU) Kuratov laughingly referred to recent negative articles in the local press that have labeled Green Salvation a "radical organization" seeking to subvert and undermine the integrity of the government. The articles questioned why the NGO has filed suit against the government, implying that this was unpatriotic. Kuratov said that Green Salvation was only trying to uphold Kazakhstani laws and international agreements, and ensure that Kazakhstan followed the Aarhus Convention, to which it is a signatory. "If defending citizens' rights is radical," he said, "if protecting their rights under existing Kazakhstani law is radical, then, yes, Green Salvation is radical."

18. (SBU) COMMENT: It is inspiring to witness the dedication and persistence of an indigenous NGO like Green Salvation. With the OSCE Chairmanship looming in 2010, Kazakhstan would do well to honor and acknowledge the work of organizations such as this, which

demonstrate the diversity and activism of Kazakhstan's civil society. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND